



# The Spectacle

## Christmas at Arlington

“Home for the holidays” meant Arlington at Christmas, for the Lees. Robert E. Lee felt this was a time when families should be together and, whenever possible, he and his family returned to Arlington to share the season with Mary’s parents. Lee’s occupation as an Army Engineer favored winter vacations, when the work was shut down by weather. Frequently, hardships of travel and health had to be overcome to reach Arlington at Christmas. But, despite these challenges, Robert was away from Mary at Christmas only during the war in Mexico from 1846-1849 and in 1860 when he was stationed in Texas. Starting in 1831, the first year of the Lees’ marriage, Robert was at Arlington 20 out of a possible 30 Christmases while the family lived there—a phenomenal record for a soldier on active duty for all those years.

The observance of Christmas at Arlington was most immediately influenced by the deep religious convictions of Mrs. Custis and Mr. Custis’ love of George Washington, Mount Vernon and all associations with that house that had been his home until his Grandmother, Martha Washington, died in 1802. The fact that the Washingtons had chosen the Christmas season 1758-59 to be married made their wedding anniversary, January 6th an important part of the Arlington celebration.

Christmas at Arlington began on December 17, when Mr. Custis had the greens brought in. The pine, ivy, holly and myrtle filled Arlington and were kept fresh through the twelve days of Christmas. Mistletoe was suspended from lanterns and arches. Any unsuspecting loiterer, found beneath, was



The White Parlor decorated for Christmas

required to forfeit a kiss. On Christmas Eve, Mr. Custis supervised the placement of the yule log. A piece of the log from the previous Christmas was used to ignite the highly decorated log of the new season. This old Norse and Anglo-Saxon custom was an important part of the Arlington Christmas celebration.

Christmas day itself began with ‘Christmas gifting’ of family members, guests and servants followed by morning prayer and breakfast. Then, weather permitting, the family attended services at Christ Episcopal Church in Alexandria where Robert and Mary had worshiped since childhood. After exchanging season’s greetings with town friends and family the carriage would return to Arlington in time for the feast. The celebration continued until Robert had to return to duty in January.

As the Lee family grew with the births of seven children between 1832 and 1846, Christmas at Arlington became very child oriented. Books, dolls, boots, skates, and a tool chest were among the gifts exchanged on this day.

Christmas 1846 found Robert E. Lee away from his family and Arlington at Christmas for the first time in 15 years. From his tent near a small Mexican town he wrote to Custis and Rooney on Christmas Eve:

“I hope good Santa Claus will fill my Rob’s stockings tonight, that Mildred’s, Agnes’s, and Annie’s may break down with good things. I do not know what he may have for you and Mary, but if he only leaves for you one half of what I wish, you will want for nothing. I have frequently thought if I

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## Christmas at Arlington (continued)

had one of you on each side of me riding on ponies, such as I could get you, I would be comparatively happy.” Robert wrote separately to ‘My Dearest Mary’ on Christmas Day and he described his Christmas dinner. The table was decorated with pine and oranges and bottles of wine. The feast featured roasted turkey and chicken and, among other good things, eggnog. He had made use of the Mount Vernon flatware which Mr. Custis had sent with him. It was placed at the Commanding Officer’s place and admired by all. He continued to remember with Mary the Christmases they had shared.

“We have had many happy Christmas’ together, and this is the first time that we have been entirely separated at this holy time since our marriage, and though I have been absent on two or three other occasions on the day itself, yet have not been far distant and always arrived during the holy days. We have therefore nothing to complain of and I hope it has not interfered with your happiness, surrounded as you are by father, Mother, children and dear friends. I therefore trust you are well and happy and that this is the last time I shall be absent from you during my life. May God preserve and bless you till then and forever after is my constant prayer.”

This family, like many others, would not be reunited until the end of the war. Their next Christmas together would be celebrated between assignments for Lee, in 1848, at Arlington.

Christmas 1849 found the Lees settled in Baltimore where Robert was working on the construction of Fort Carroll. They returned to Arlington for every Christmas until 1852. The celebrations were grand, as Lee described in a letter to his eldest son, Custis, who was absent in 1851.

“We came on Wednesday morning. It

was a bitter cold day, and we were kept waiting an hour in the depot at Baltimore for the cars, which were detained by the snow and ice on the rails. We found your grandfather at the Washington depot, Daniel and the old carriage and horses, and young Daniel on the colt Mildred. Your mother, grandfather, Mary Eliza, the little people and the baggage, I thought load enough for the carriage, so Rooney and I took our feet in our hands and walked over . . . The snow impeded the carriage as well as us, and we reached here shortly after it. The children were delighted at getting back, and passed the evening in devising pleasure for the morrow. They were in upon us before day on Christmas morning, to overhaul their stockings. Mildred thinks she drew the prize in the shape of a beautiful new doll; Angelina’s infirmities were so great that she was left in Baltimore and this new treasure was entirely unexpected. The cakes, candies, books, etc., were overlooked in the caresses bestowed upon her, and she was scarcely out of her arms all day. Rooney got among his gifts a nice pair of boots, which he particularly wanted, and the girls, I hope, were equally pleased with their presents, books, and trinkets.

Your mother, Mary, Rooney, and I went into church, and Rooney... skated back along the canal (Rooney having taken his skates along for the purpose,) and we filled his place in the carriage with Miss Sarah Stuart, one of M.’s comrades, Minny Uoyd was detained at home to assist her mother at dinner but your Aunt Maria Fitzhugh brought her and Miss Lucretia Fitzhugh out the next day, and Wallace Stiles and his brother arriving at the same time, we had quite a table-full...

I need not describe to you our amusements, you have witnessed them so often; nor the turkey, cold ham,

plum pudding, mince-pies, etc. at dinner. I hope you will enjoy them again, or some equally as good... “

From 1852-1854, Colonel Lee’s position as Superintendent of the Military Academy at West Point required the elder Lees’ presence during the holidays, so they were away from Arlington for Christmas. In 1856, Lee was absent from the Arlington Christmas celebrations once again after he was transferred to Texas with the Second United States Cavalry. However, his thoughts were with his wife and children, as he wrote to them from afar:

“The time is approaching when I trust many of you will be assembled around the family hearth at dear Arlington, to celebrate another Christmas. Though absent, my heart will be in the midst of you, and I shall enjoy in imagination and memory, all that is going on. May nothing occur to mar or cloud the family fireside, and may each be able to look back with pride and pleasure at their deeds of the past year and with confidence and hope to that in prospect. I can do nothing but hope and pray for you.”

Again, only a few days before Christmas, he wrote:

“I have been recalling dearest Mary the many happy Christmases we have had together, and the pleasure I have enjoyed with you, your dear parents and the children around me. I ought not therefore to repine at an occasional separation from you, but be grateful for what I have had, and be prepared to keep this solitary and alone My prayers and thoughts will be with you and all will receive my fervent salutations. I hope nothing will be omitted that I could have done, to make each one happy.”

Lee was back at Arlington for Christmas in 1857, on leave from the army to manage the

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# History Happenings

Have you ever wondered where some of the stories we tell at Arlington originated? For example, what do we know about “Sister’s” arrest? What about Spec the terrier who leaped out of a second floor window to attend church with the family? Or Robert E. Lee’s failure to recognize his youngest son during the Civil War? What did Mildred Lee do to anger her mother in the early days of the war? Did the Lee girls truly scandalize Lexington society with their ice skating?

Much of our everyday interpretation comes from several key sources. Rob. Jr.’s memoir, *Recollections and Letters of General Lee*, contains two of the stories above in addition to many private family stories and letters. “Rob” begins his book with a charming story on the very first page. His father had just returned home after the Mexican War and failed to recognize his namesake! In fact, Lee actually picked up a neighbor’s child thinking it was his youngest son. Later Rob recounts a story in which he tried to earn a living by shooting crows at Arlington.

The story of “Daughter’s” arrest comes from *The Lee Girls*. Author Mary Coulling also provides the story of Mary’s remarkable travels through Europe, including a dangerous fall through the roof of an old cathedral in England and a covert visit to a mosque while disguised as a man. Agnes and Annie’s account of their time “in jail”, as they referred to their Staunton school, is also included. Coulling later traces Mildred Lee’s loneliness throughout much of her adult life.

Agnes Lee’s journal, *Growing Up in the 1850s*, provides many excellent stories as well. She offers a detailed description of the renovation of the White Parlor in 1855 and notes how she and her siblings had once ridden their stick horses in the room. She later recounts her grandfather’s final hours in great detail. The journal also contains Mildred Lee’s poignant and vivid description of Arlington’s flower garden and its importance in the lives of the Custis and Lee women.

Rose MacDonald paints a detailed description of the Lees’ wedding day in the time-honored biography, *Mrs. Robert E. Lee*. This classic contains a charming description

of Mary Custis Lee as a baby and shows a rare glimpse of Mrs. Lee as a boastful mother. Detailed accounts of family celebrations at Christmas time, including the practice of “catching” late sleepers, can also be found here. Mrs. MacDonald also describes the religious practices at Arlington, many of which originated with Molly Custis.

These four basic sources provide a wealth of stories to share with visitors. Many of you have asked for sources to read for additional information. All of these books are available at the Arlington House bookstore (remember your 15% discount!). Reference copies may be used at the site, and are available at the OAB. Rob Jr.’s book is even available on-line. You can read the entire manuscript at the following website: <http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/recollections.htm>. Remember, there is no substitute for reading, as each of us will interpret these stories in our own way. As always, we greatly appreciate your generous donation of time and eagerness to learn increase your knowledge of “dear Old Arlington.”

Karen Kinzey, Historian



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Arlington House was the home of Robert E. Lee and his family for thirty years and is uniquely associated with the Washington and Custis families. It is now preserved as a memorial to General Lee, who gained the respect of Americans in both the North and the South.

**Arlington House**  
**The Robert E. Lee Memorial**  
c/o George Washington Memorial Parkway  
Turkey Run Park  
McLean, VA 22101

**Phone**  
703-235-1530

**Web Site**  
<http://www.nps.gov/arho>

**The Spectacle online**  
<http://www.nps.gov/arho/tour/spectacle.html>

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

## Christmas Program

Arlington House’s annual Christmas Program will be presented on Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2:00-4:00pm. This year’s program will include an interpretive talk by VIP Delia Rios entitled “December 1860, the Last Christmas.” Musical entertainment will be provided by Arlington’s Yorktown High School Madrigal Singers.



You and your guests are cordially invited to the Arlington House  
Volunteer and Staff Holiday Celebration  
Tuesday, December 13, 2005

the holiday celebration will be held in the Old Administration Building (Park Service Office) from 4  
P.M. until 6 P.M.

Please join us and celebrate the holiday season at Arlington House

# Area Special Events

## December 1-2

Living history, “St. Nick at Endview,” a Civil War-era Santa at Endview Plantation in Newport News, VA. 5-7 pm. \$3 Reservations. 757-887-1862 or [www.endview.org](http://www.endview.org).

## December 3

Annual Memorial Illumination at the Antietam National Battlefield. More than 23,000 candles placed on the battlefield, each representing a casualty. Driving tour begins 6 pm on Route 34 east of Sharpsburg, MD. Inclement weather reschedule date is Dec. 10. The park visitor center will close at 3 pm. 301-432-5124 or [www.nps.gov/anti](http://www.nps.gov/anti).

Living history, “Confederate Christmas of 1861,” visit a camp at Tryon Palace in New Bern, NC before the Federal occupation. Drills, music and more. 9 am-5 pm. Free with admission. [www.tryonpalace.org](http://www.tryonpalace.org) or 800-767-1560.

Living history, “A Civil War Christmas at Liberia Plantation,” part of the Manassas Museum System. Civil War encampment, music and more. 5-9 pm. \$15. 703-368-1873 or [www.manassasmuseum.org](http://www.manassasmuseum.org).

Christmas Open House at the Bentonville Battlefield near Four Oaks, NC. Living history, decorations and more. 10 am-4 pm. Free. 910-594-0789.

## December 3-4

Living history, “Prospects of Peace: A Soldier’s Prayer,” citizens and soldiers in 1864 Harpers Ferry, WV at the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Free with admission. [www.nps.gov/hafe](http://www.nps.gov/hafe) or 304-535-6029

## December 4

Christmas Open House at Bennett Place in Durham, NC. Living history, demonstrations and more. Free. 919-383-4345.

Open House at Mulberry Hill Plantation, part of the Staunton River Battlefield State Park near Randolph, VA. House decorated as

it would have been during the war. 2-5 pm. Fee charged. 434-454-4312 or [www.stauntonriverbattlefield.org](http://www.stauntonriverbattlefield.org).

## December 10

Special program, “Constellation’s Restoration,” examines the restoration and never-ending maintenance of the USS Constellation anchored in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. Noon. Free with admission. [www.constellation.org](http://www.constellation.org) or 410-539-1797.

Special program, “Museums by Candlelight,” annual event in Frederick, MD includes the National Museum of Civil War Medicine. Living history, music and more. 2-7 pm. Free. 301-695-1864 or [www.civilwarmed.org](http://www.civilwarmed.org).

Living history, “Christmas at Stagville,” near Durham, NC. Period music, demonstrations, living history and dancing. Events at both the slave quarter and the plantation house. 10 am-4 pm. 919-620-0120.

Special program, “Christmas in Camp Open House,” soldier and civilian living history, Victorian decorations, music, refreshments and tours of the fort at Fort Ward in Alexandria, VA. Noon-4 pm. \$2 adults. 703-838-4848 or [www.fortward.org](http://www.fortward.org).

Special program, “Christmastime at Lee Hall,” special decorations, music and refreshments at Lee Hall in Newport News, VA. 5, 6 and 7 pm. \$7. Reservations required. 757-888-3371 or [www.leehall.org](http://www.leehall.org).

## December 10-11

Living history, encampment, period music, kids’ games and military demonstrations at Ferry Farm, George Washington’s Boyhood Home across the river from Fredericksburg, VA. 10 am-4 pm Saturday, 10 am-2 pm Sunday. \$5. [www.ferryfarm.org](http://www.ferryfarm.org) or 540-370-0732, extension 11.

Reenactment, “The Battle of Fredericksburg.” Events scheduled on both sides of the Rappahannock River including two battles on Saturday. Activities in

downtown Fredericksburg (VA) and at Ferry Farm. Check [www.47thVA.org](http://www.47thVA.org) for updated information and schedules.

Reenactment, “Christmas in the Field,” living history, music, sutlers and battles each day at Endview Plantation in Newport News, VA. 10 am-4 pm. \$6 (house tours additional). 757-887-1862 or [www.endview.org](http://www.endview.org).

## December 11

Open house and living history at Hanover Tavern, on Route 301 north of Richmond, VA. The Christmas of 1864 is recreated at this 18th-century tavern. Free. 804-537-5050 or [www.hanovertavern.org](http://www.hanovertavern.org).

Walking tour and ceremony at the Fredericksburg National Battlefield (VA) commemorate the anniversary of the battle. Wreath laying at the Kirkland Memorial at 2 pm following a walking tour of the Irish Brigade march from City Dock. Free. More info: [www.nps.gov/frsp](http://www.nps.gov/frsp)

Special event, “Court End Christmas,” attractions in Richmond’s “Court End” neighborhood, which includes the Museum of the Confederacy, are open with free admission. Noon-5 pm. 804-649-1861.

## December 17-19

Special tours, holiday decoration and exhibits at the Surratt House Museum in Clinton, MD. 6-9 pm. \$3. Details: [www.surratt.org](http://www.surratt.org) or 301-868-1121.

## December 31

New Year’s Eve Deck Party on the USS Constellation anchored in Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. 10 pm-1 am. Call for ticket info. Free with admission. [www.constellation.org](http://www.constellation.org) or 410-539-1797.



# Significant Historic Events in December

## December 1, 1859

Robert E. Lee wrote to his wife from Harper's Ferry, which he was guarding for an indefinite time before and after the execution of John Brown on December 2. "Tomorrow will probably be the last of Captain Brown. There will be less interest for the others, but will still I think the troops will not be withdrawn till they are similarly disposed of." Brown's wife, Mary, asked Lee's permission to say farewell to her husband, but Lee could only refer her to the commander in Charlestown where the execution was to take place. (Mary Brown was allowed to visit him in his cell that afternoon).

## December 1, 1861

Arlington had now been occupied but the United States Army for more than six months. In a letter to Orton Williams, Agnes Lee is reminded of the Lee's cat, Tom Tita, who she says "is so entirely associates with a winter at home." She imagines him "freezing up in the garret where Cousin Markie last saw him [in July], afraid of those federal soldiers."

## December 1, 1862

President Abraham Lincoln proposed three constitutional amendments, which would have provided form compensated emancipation and colonization of the freedmen outside the United States. "As our case is new, so we must thing anew, and act anew. We must disenfranchise ourselves, and then we shall save our country. Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history... We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth."

## December 2, 1859

John Brown was hung at 11:30 AM. The field of execution was ringed by 1500 soldiers, including Virginia Military Institute cadets commanded by Professor Thomas (later "Stonewall") Jackson and a Richmond militia private, John Wilkes Booth. When the trap was sprung, a militia colonel broke the stillness, "So perish all such enemies of Virginia! All such enemies of the Union! All

such enemies of the human race!" But John Brown had the last word. Just before his execution he had written, "I John Brown. am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood. I had, as I now think, vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed it might be done."

"At Harper's Ferry nothing more exciting happened than the arrival of Brown's body and its transshipment to Philadelphia." Lee and the troops were returned to their respective stations on December 12. "The country continued to debate bitterly the rights and wrongs of Brown's attempt, but the affair seems to have affected Lee very little."

## December 4, 1860

In his State of the Union Address, President James Buchanan declared that succession was "revolution" and unjustifiable. On the other hand, he declared that states were sovereign and their rights could not be interfered with. The message was condemned in both the North and South—in the South, because the President condemned secession, and in the North, because he proposed no way to deal with it.

## December 2, 1863

Freedman's Village on Arlington estate was officially dedicated with representatives from Congress, the cabinet, and the Army on hand for the ceremonies. "A model of its kind... , the village normally housed about 2,000 freedmen in rows of two-and-a-half story, white frame houses on streets named in honor of prominent abolitionists." There were churches, a hospital, schools, and home for the aged. The able-bodied freedmen were taught useful trades or cultivated the fields. Secretary of State William H. Seward "demonstrated his interest in the intellectual wellbeing of the village residents by his personal support of the school."

At first Freedman's village was located in the low lying areas of Arlington estate but was

eventually moved to what is now Section 4 of the cemetery. "Neighboring residences complained of the crime associated with the village and of the financial burden they were forced to assume as federal assistance to the villagers was reduced." After 1882, when the federal government acquired clear title to Arlington estate from Custis Lee, the land became part of a military reservation, and civilians were prohibited from living there. On December 7, 1887 the residents were notified that they had ninety days to vacate the premises... By 1890, after nearly thirty years, Freedman's Village was dismantled and the residents were forced to leave."

## December 4, 1882

In a five-to-four decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the United States had taken Arlington estate without due process and the Custis Lee was its rightful owner. More than a decade before Custis Lee "had been advised by his legal counsel that, because of the questionable procedure used in obtaining the title, the government's claim to the Arlington estate was tenuous at best. He therefore made overtures to recover just compensation for the property. In April, 1874 his formal claim was presented to the United States Senate, where it received a hostile response from Republican. Custis Lee then brought an action for ejectment against the United States in April 1877. In March 1883, Congress finally appropriated \$150,000 as compensation, and Custis Lee executed the deed to Arlington estate on May 14.

## December 5, 1855

Robert E. Lee left Arlington to attend to GWP Custis' tangled accounts at the White House estate on the Pamunkey River. By the time he left for Carlisle Barracks in January 1856, he had checked the accounts of his father-in-law's agent, Francis Nelson, and discovered them "in error to the sum of about \$6,000 in addition to which there were \$6400 of vouchers requiring further examination." The estates themselves Lee found in good order.

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# Significant Historic Events in December (continued)

## December 5, 1860

Lee wrote to his son Custis, then stationed at Fort Washington, Maryland: "If union is dissolved, which God in his mercy forbid, I shall return to you. If not, tell my friends to give me all the promotion they can."

## December 6, 1884

The Washington Monument, 555 feet high, was completed. GWP Custis had been present for the laying of its cornerstone on July 4, 1848 and it was completed under direction of Horatio Wright, who is buried in front of Arlington House.

## December 8, 1863

President Abraham Lincoln issued his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, pardoning those who "directly or by implication, participated in the existing rebellion" if they took an oath to the Union. Exceptions included men such as Lee who were high-ranking military officers in the Confederacy. "Thus Lincoln made a significant step toward reconstruction, and indicated his future course of moderation."

## December 10, 1862

Robert E. Lee wrote his daughter-in-law, Charlotte Wickham Lee, the wife of his son Rooney, a letter of sympathy: "I heard yesterday, my dear of the death of your infant. I was so grateful at her birth. I felt that she would be such a comfort to you, such a pleasure to my dear Fitzhugh, and would fill so full the void still aching in your hearts. But you have now two sweet angels in heaven. What joy there is in the thought! I can say nothing to soften the anguish you must feel, and I know you are assured of my deep and affectionate sympathy. May God give you strength to bear the affliction He has imposed, and produce future joy out of your present misery, is my earnest prayer."

## December 11, 1804

This is the earliest known date on which GWP Custis referred to his home, formerly known as "Mt. Washington," as Arlington House.

## December 13, 1856

Colonel Lee wrote Mrs. Lee from Fort Brown, Texas. He hoped that James Buchanan, recently elected president, would "be able to extinguish fanaticism North and South...and restore harmony between the different sections." He added, "that if anything should turn up in the way of promotion, ask your father if suitable and proper to apply in my behalf. The office of Inspector General would suit me well..."

## December 13, 1862

The Battle of Fredricksburg. General Ambrose Burnside, who replaced McClellan at the beginning of November, proved his lack of fitness for high command by delaying his crossing of the Rappahannock River for weeks while Lee gathered his scattered forces and prepared for an attack by United States forces. When Burnside's troops finally began crossing the river on the 11th, they faced a Confederate army solidly established on high ground with a clear field on fire. "A futile, wild, fantastic, direct slam by federal against the exceedingly well entrenched Confederates of Lee failed miserably." Lee, watching the battle through field glasses, murmured to an aide, "It is well that war is so terrible—we should grow too fond of it." United States casualties numbered more than 12,000; the Confederate lost less than half that number. "The heroism was there, but not the strategy."

## December 14, 1824

On their way from Mt. Vernon to Washington, General Lafayette and his son George Washington Lafayette, made a "flying visit" to Alexandria and dined with Ann Lee, the widow of Lafayette comrade in arms, General Henry Lee. Undoubtedly Robert E. Lee, 17, was in attendance.

## December 14, 1860

In a letter to his son Custis, then stationed at Fort Washington, Maryland, Lee wrote: "Feeling the aggression of the North, resenting their denial of the equal rights of our citizens of the common territory of the

commonwealth, etc., I am not pleased with the course of the 'Cotton States,' as they term themselves. In addition to their selfish, dictatorial bearing, the threats they throw out against the 'Border States,' as they call them, if they will not join them, argue little for the benefit. While I wish to do what is right, I am unwilling to do what is wrong, either at the bidding of the South or the North. One of their plans seems to be the renewal of the slave trade. That I am opposed to on every ground..."

## December 15, 1860

On or about this date, Lee has a conversation with fellow officer Charles Anderson—brother of the Major Robert Anderson who was to be in command of Fort Sumter when the first shots of the war were to be fired—and Dr. Willis G. Edwards. When Dr. Edwards raised the question of whether a man's first allegiance was due his state or the nation, Lee answered instantly and unequivocally that he had been taught to believe "that his first obligations were due Virginia."

## December 15, 1866

In a careful letter to eminent British historian Sir John Dalberg Acton, Lee expounded the Southern constitutional view of the Civil War, which he came to understand and espouse during the conflict. Lee said he believed in "the maintenance of the rights and authority reserved in the states and to the people" and warned that the "consolidation of the states into one vast republic, sure to be aggressive abroad and despotic at home, will be the certain precursor of the ruin which has overwhelmed all those that have preceded it." Though the letter to Acton is Lee's fullest expression of Lee's constitutional views, the letter had little political significance at the time because its existence was not generally known until 1917.

## December 17, 1865

Lieutenant Colonel James Moore, Assistant Quartermaster General of the Washington

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## Significant Historic Events in December (continued)

Depot, reported to his superior that Quartermaster General Meigs had “expressed his regret that interments had not been made in close proximity to the Arlington House, Va., so as to more firmly secure the grounds known as the National Cemetery to the Government by rendering it undesirable as a future residence or homestead.

“There being more than a thousand interments yet to be made, the view of the Quartermaster General can now be carried out.

“A brother of General Lee (Smith Lee) in a recent visit to Arlington, remarked to the Superintendent [of the cemetery], that the house would still be made a pleasant residence, by fencing off the Cemetery, and removing the officers buried around the garden.”

In April 1866, Montgomery Meigs designated the flower garden of Arlington House as the site of the Tomb of the Unknown Dead of the Civil War “to assure the permanent destruction of Arlington as a habitable estate.”

### December 18, 1855

GWP Custis accompanied a group of veterans to Mt. Vernon and there made a speech as the tomb of Washington. The *National Intelligencer* noted that while Mr. Custis wore the epaulettes originally fastened on his shoulder by George Washington, the sword which Washington had given him, Custis had presented to his son-in-law Robert E. Lee before the Mexican campaign.

### December 18, 1865

The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing slavery was declared in effect by Secretary of State Seward after approval by twenty-seven states. (The Arlington slaves had been legally free since July 17, 1862 when President Lincoln had signed the Second Confiscation Act. This freed slaves of those who aided the rebellion when the slaves came within control of the

United States forces.)

### December 19, 1817

David Meade Randolph applied his “hydraulic cement” to the northwest corner of Arlington House. The Stucco was made by burning fossil shells from a deposit near Yorktown.

### December 20, 1860

South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union. “Charleston went wild with joy and expectation.”

### December 20, 1865

Markie Williams had attempted to interest General Lee in reading Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*. Lee replied that he had read some of her favorite chapters, but added, “I prefer the Bible to any other book. There is enough in that to satisfy the most ardent thirst for knowledge; to open the way to true wisdom; and to teach the only road to salvation and eternal happiness. It is not above human comprehension and is sufficient to satisfy all its desires. The difficulty is to conform the heart, the mind, and thoughts to its teaching and to obtain the strength to bring the body under the control of its spirit.”

### December 25, 1861

Robert E. Lee wrote his wife on Christmas day from Coosawatchie, South Carolina: “As to our old home, if not destroyed, it will be difficult ever to be recognized. Even if the enemy had wished to preserve it, it would almost have been impossible. With the number of troops encamped around it, the change of officers, and c. The want of fuels, shelter, and c., and all the dire necessities of war, it is vain to think of its being in a habitable condition. I fear too books and furniture, and the relics of Mount Vernon will be gone. It is better to make up our minds to a general loss. They cannot take away the remembrances of the spot, and the memories of those that to us rendered it sacred. That will remain to us as long as life will last, and that we can preserve.

In the absence of a home, I wish I could purchase Stratford. That is the only other place that I could go to, now accessible to is, that would inspire me with feelings of pleasure and local love. You and the girls could remain there in quiet. It is a poor place, but we could make enough cornbread and bacon for our support, and the girls could weave us clothes. I wonder if it is for sale and at how much...”

On the same day he wrote one of his daughters: “Your old home, if not destroyed by our enemies has been so desecrated that I cannot bear to think of it. I should have preferred it to have been wiped from the earth, its beautiful hill sunk, and its sacred trees buried rather than to have degraded but the presence of those who revel in the ill they do fore their own selfish purposes. You see what a poor sinner I am, and how unworthy to possess what was given me; for that reason it has been take away. I pray for a better spirit, and that the hearts of our enemies may be changed.”

### December 25, 1862

To his daughter Mildred Lee wrote: “I have pleased myself in reminiscences today of the many happy Xmas’ we have enjoyed together at our once happy home. Notwithstanding its present desecrated and pillaged condition, I trust that a just and merciful God may yet gather all that He may spare under its beloved roof. How filled with thanks and gratitude will our hearts then be! But in the meantime let us not forget how abundantly He has blessed is in our condition, and should it please Him eventually to establish our independence and spare our lives, all will be well.”

### December 26, 1799

Congressman and former three-time governor of Virginia Henry Lee, father of Robert E. Lee, eulogized George Washington with the now familiar words, “First in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”

# RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Chestnut Soup was a 19<sup>th</sup> century favorite. It is a great dish to serve around the holidays. Below are both a 19<sup>th</sup> century recipe for the soup as well as a more modern and easier to follow recipe.

## Chestnut Soup (19th Century Recipe)

Scald, peel and scrape 50 large chestnuts; put these into a stewpan with 2 oz. of butter, an onion, 4 lumps of sugar, and a little pepper and salt, and simmer the whole over a slow fire for three-quarters of an hour; then bruise the chestnuts in a mortar; remove the pulp into a stewpan, add a quart of good brown gravy, and having rubbed the purée through a Tammy, pour it into a stewpan; make it hot and serve with fried crusts.

## Chestnut Soup (21<sup>st</sup> Century Recipe)

3 Tbs. margarine  
2 onions, thin slice  
2 lbs. chestnuts, peeled  
6 cups chicken stock  
1/8 tsp. mace  
salt & pepper to taste  
1 cup heavy cream

Melt margarine in kettle. Add onion, carrot, & cinnamon stick. Cover and cook until vegetables are browned. Stir frequently near end of cooking time to prevent burning. Remove cinnamon stick. Blend in chestnuts and stock. Cook until chestnuts are tender, 15-20 minutes. Puree in blender. Return puree to kettle. Add seasonings and whisk in the cream. Keep warm but do not boil.

The recipes were found on these two websites:

<http://www.godecooking.com/begrec/begrec58.htm>

<http://www.foodreference.com/html/chestnutsoup.html>.

Contributed by Kara Walker

# Arlington House Construction Project

Starting around May 2006, a construction project will begin at Arlington House to install fire suppression and update the heating and cooling in the main house and the Slave Quarters.

In order to protect the museum collection, in December 2005 the curatorial staff will begin packing the objects and moving them out of the house into storage. They will start with the smaller objects – smaller paintings, books, dishes, silver; and inventory everything as the project progresses.

Please be sure to check the rooms when you are working. The staff will do their best to keep everyone current on the progress, including updates in the Spectacle.

## AN IMPORTANT REMINDER

Please contact Delphine Gross no later than the 20th of each month with availability dates and times to be posted the following month (Please call by December 20th with January information). Even if you are a regularly scheduled VIP please contact Delphine to confirm your availability. Again, the contact number is (703) 235-1530 ext. 227. Please leave the dates and times you are available on the voice mail. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

## Christmas at Arlington (continued)

affairs of the Arlington plantation, in the wake of Mr. Custis's death. Duties connected with the estate would keep him at Arlington through Christmas the following year. In the spring of 1860, Lee returned to Texas and stayed there through the following winter. As Christmas, 1860 approached, Mrs. Lee's health and the unsettled state of national affairs precluded any thought of her going West. With the election of Abraham Lincoln in November, South Carolina seceded. Concern for the future of the Union was reflected in Colonel Lee's Christmas

greeting:

"Although you anticipated a quiet Christmas, I hope it was a happy one to you all, and that you were filled with gratitude for the many blessings that surrounded you. Although distant, my heart and thoughts were ever present with you and my prayers were offered for Heavens choicest benefits for you all.... Here we are far removed and get the essence of all disunion movements from the New Orleans papers.... I am

particularly anxious that 'Virginia should keep right, and inauguration of the Constitution, so I would wish that she might be able to maintain it and save the union.'"

Unfortunately this was not to be and, as it turned out, Christmas of 1860 would be the Lee family's last at Arlington. Virginia voted to secede from the Union in April 1861 and the Lees left Arlington for good shortly before the estate was occupied by U.S. Army troops in May 1861.



# December 2005

## Arlington House VIP Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				<b>1</b> Walter DeGroot 9:30-11:30  Charlotte Needham and Elaine Street 10:30-1:00  Gene Cross 11:00-4:30	<b>2</b> Joan Cashell 9:30-11:30  Aaron LaRocca 1:00-4:00	<b>3</b> Aaron LaRocca 10:00-3:00
<b>4</b> Jim Pearson 12:30-4:30  Andrew Strait 1:30-4:30	<b>5</b> Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00	<b>6</b> Kathie Lipovac 12:30-4:30  Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00	<b>7</b> Matt Abney 9:30-1:30  Aaron LaRocca 12:00-3:00	<b>8</b> Walter DeGroot 9:30-11:30  Charlotte Needham and Elaine Street 10:30-1:00  Gene Cross 11:00-4:30	<b>9</b> Joan Cashell 9:30-11:30  Aaron LaRocca 1:00-4:00	<b>10</b> Aaron LaRocca 10:00-3:00  Marmie Edwards 10:00-4:00  Delia Rios 12:00-2:00
<b>11</b> Elene Paul 11:00-4:00  Jim Pearson 12:30-4:30  Andrew Strait 1:30-4:30	<b>12</b> Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00	<b>13</b> Kathie Lipovac 12:30-4:30  Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00	<b>14</b> Matt Abney 9:30-1:30  Aaron LaRocca 12:00-3:00	<b>15</b> Walter DeGroot 9:30-11:30  Charlotte Needham and Elaine Street 10:30-1:00  Gene Cross 11:00-4:30	<b>16</b> Joan Cashell 9:30-11:30  Aaron LaRocca 1:00-4:00	<b>17</b> Aaron LaRocca 10:00-3:00  Marmie Edwards 10:00-4:00  Delia Rios 12:00-2:00
<b>18</b> Elene Paul 11:00-3:00  Jim Pearson 12:30-4:30	<b>19</b> Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00	<b>20</b> Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00	<b>21</b> Aaron LaRocca 12:00-3:00	<b>22</b> Walter DeGroot 9:30-11:30  Charlotte Needham 10:30-1:00  Gene Cross 11:00-4:30	<b>23</b> Joan Cashell 9:30-11:30  Aaron LaRocca 1:00-4:00	<b>24</b> Aaron LaRocca 10:00-3:00
<b>25</b> <b>Merry Christmas</b>	<b>26</b> Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00	<b>27</b> Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00	<b>28</b> Aaron LaRocca 12:00-3:00	<b>29</b> Walter DeGroot 9:30-11:30  Charlotte Needham 10:30-1:00  Gene Cross 11:00-4:30	<b>30</b> Joan Cashell 9:30-11:30  Aaron LaRocca 1:00-4:00	<b>31</b> Aaron LaRocca 10:00-3:00  Andrew Strait 1:30-4:30

**If you are available to volunteer, but are not on the calendar please call Delphine so you can be added to the schedule.**



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Arlington House  
The Robert E. Lee Memorial  
c/o George Washington Memorial Parkway  
Turkey Run Park  
McLean, VA 22101

<<Name>>  
<<Address>>  
<<CityStateZip>>

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

The Spectacle is a monthly newsletter for the volunteers of Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial.

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## Volunteers Needed

The roster of active volunteers is in dire need of additional names! If you know anyone interested in joining our ranks please refer them to Delphine Gross, Volunteer Coordinator (703) 235-1530 ext 227.

